



The Cabin Connection

A publication of the Asset Inspection Division of the Texas General Land Office • Jerry Patterson, Commissioner

June 2014

A Message from Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson



Welcome to the Summer 2014 edition of the *Cabin Connection*.

It's been another busy year for the Cabin Program. In this issue, we'll update you on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' finalized policy concerning structures along the Intracoastal Waterway, including some cabin structures. We also feature an article about a restored, historic oyster reef along the Texas mid-coast. In addition, many of you have asked, and we are pleased to announce that we will have temporary dumpsters in the Laguna Madre this fall.

As always, we have the photos and stories you submitted about your experiences at the cabins. Please remember to check the Tips and Information section for the latest updates and information on Cabin Program policies.

Thank you again for your participation and stewardship of the Texas coast. Feel free to contact us with any questions, concerns or ideas for improvement and have a safe and enjoyable summer on the coast.

JERRY PATTERSON
Commissioner, Texas General Land Office

Nature Conservancy Rebuilds Historic Texas Oyster Reef

The Nature Conservancy has begun work to reconstruct Half Moon Reef, a once-massive oyster reef that has virtually disappeared over the last century in Matagorda Bay, one of the largest estuaries and most productive fisheries in Texas.

Construction occurred in two phases between November 2013 and March 2014, with crews installing limestone reef rows in Matagorda Bay near Palacios Point to create a 57-acre reef, approximately seven to eight feet beneath the bay surface. The project was financed with a \$3.8 million grant through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Impact Assistance Program, which is administered through the Texas General Land Office and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. Additional funders include the Meadows Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, KBR, Shell Oil and El Paso Corporation.

Mark Dumesnil, Associate Director of Coastal Restoration for The Nature Conservancy in Texas, said the unique three-dimensional design of the reef will provide a "domino effect" of benefits.

"This really is an innovative approach to oyster reef construction," Dumesnil said. "When you have healthy oyster reefs, you have excellent habitat for small fish and other reef-dependent species, reliable food for bigger fish and water filtration. All of that leads to healthier commercial and recreational fisheries, a first line of de-

fense against storms and hurricanes, cleaner water and a more resilient ecosystem overall."

Surveys from the early 1900s suggest the reef was once nearly 500 acres in area. Several factors over the last century have led to its demise.

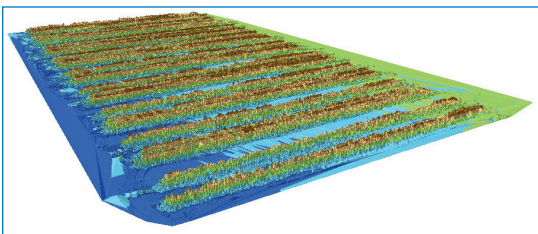
"Matagorda is one of the largest estuaries in Texas — the freshwater that enters into the bay from Texas rivers and streams is crucial to its health," said Laura Huffman, Texas State Director for The Nature Conservancy. "We already know the reef can withstand drought conditions but what we want to test is whether it will help the entire bay system better tolerate periods of drought and low freshwater flows. If we can prove that, this work will have relevancy for coastal cities struggling to manage their marine resources amid drier conditions and scarcer freshwater supplies worldwide."

For more information on Half Moon Reef visit www.nature.org/Texas, and you can also find the restored reef on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Navigational Charts 11317 and 11319.

This article can be found on The Nature Conservancy's website at <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/texas/newsroom/nature-conservancy-begins-rebuild-of-historic-texas-oyster-reef.xml>.



Project location map.



Sonar image depicting created oyster reef. Image courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.

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Please send us photographs, stories, recipes or any other items of interest for future newsletters. We welcome your input.

Tips and Information

- The Texas General Land Office (GLO) now administers the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) General Permit for pier structures associated with cabin permits. This authorization is in conjunction with your cabin permit, does not affect existing piers, and may not apply to every cabin permit. As always, if you propose to modify, rebuild or relocate your pier, prior authorization from the GLO is required. After approval, the GLO will provide you with a copy of your USACE General Permit (if applicable) as part of a single cabin permit packet. No additional paperwork is needed from you.
- If you've been contacted by more people than usual who are interested in cabin permits, it's because we've gotten a large amount of open record requests for permit holder information from the public this year.
- Thanks to all of you who are using our new Docusign process to sign your cabin permit electronically. If you have not yet sent us your email address, please send it to cabins@glo.texas.gov so we can add it to our database. We appreciate your help in streamlining the permit process.
- You **must** have prior written approval from the GLO before making **ANY** changes to the cabin or associated structures. Send an email to us at cabins@glo.texas.gov to request any changes. Please note there is now a \$175 amendment fee if you request changes during your contract term that result in an amendment contract. You can be fined, put on probation or possibly have your permit terminated if you do not obtain approval before making changes.
- Burning trash and debris of any kind at the cabin site or on state-owned land is strictly prohibited and anyone found in violation may face termination of his or her permit.
- Bird disturbance is a violation of state and federal law. Avoid nesting waterbirds from February 15th to September 1st of every year. Be sure to keep all domestic animals on a leash and away from the birds as well.
- We use email as often as possible, for example, to send out renewal applications and for the electronic signature of your permit. Please make sure we always have your most current email address. In addition, if you're planning to move, please contact us as soon as possible so we can update your records with your new mailing address and phone numbers.
- In case of emergencies, please use VHF channel 16, call 911, or your local county sheriff. Also, contact your county sheriff if you notice any suspicious activity or if you have break-ins occur at the cabin. Please contact us when break-ins happen as well. We can notify other permit holders in your area.
- Permits effective September 1, 2015 and later will now be charged \$0.20 per square foot for the piers and walkways which were previously no charge encumbrances. Please call or email us if you would like to know your estimated increase in rates.
- Using a cast net for bait? You must throw back all the trash bait you do not keep or a game warden may ticket you. A cast net is a net that can be hand-thrown over an area. It may be used to take nongame fish and shrimp only; may not be greater than 14 feet in diameter; and in salt water, nongame fish may be taken for bait purposes only. For more information, visit Texas Parks and Wildlife's (TPWD) website at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/regulations/fish_hunt/ for the most current fishing, hunting and boating regulations. There's also a link to Floating Cabins, which are managed by TPWD.
- **No commercial activity of ANY kind is allowed in connection with the GLO Cabin Program. It's a violation of state law to charge people for guide services and let them stay "free" at the cabin. These state-owned structures may ONLY be used for recreational purposes. Direct or indirect commercial use may subject your permit to termination.**

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Setback Policy Update

In October 2013, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) finalized a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for setbacks along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). A setback is defined as the distance a structure, such as a pier, must be "set back" from the edge of the channel. The goal of this federal SOP is to provide a margin of safety for those who use the waterway, by maintaining established setbacks from the GIWW. If your cabin permit location is along the GIWW, specifically in Kenedy (Land Cut), Willacy or Cameron counties, it's possible the pier and portions of the cabin structure may be located within the setback. Throughout last year, the Texas General Land Office staff met with the USACE to identify and minimize impacts to the Cabin Program as a result of this draft policy. Four public forums were held along the coast to discuss the proposed policy and obtain feedback from the stakeholders. Cabin permit holders were present at all of the meetings, in fact, they comprised the largest stakeholder group

overall. We thank you for your participation in this public process and as a result, **existing piers, docks or other waterfront structures within the setback will not be required to be removed or modified.** General and routine repairs and maintenance of these existing structures are allowed, provided you are within the rules and regulations of the Cabin Program. If the structure is destroyed **beyond repair**, from a storm event or other sudden event, GLO staff will work with you and the USACE to ensure all cabin permits are in compliance with this SOP.

As always, we recommend contacting GLO staff before starting any project onsite. We will work with you to make sure you're in compliance at all times. The full version of the final document, as well as maps and other information can be found at <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/BusinessWithUs/RegulatoryBranch/ConstructionGuidelines.aspx>.

Coming This Fall – Dumpsters to the Laguna Madre

Attention Permit Holders, the Texas General Land Office staff is coordinating the temporary placement of dumpsters in the Laguna Madre for the disposal of cabin-related materials. Pending final coordination, this initiative will occur in the fall of 2014. More information will be sent via email as soon as it becomes available. As a reminder, this initiative allows you to dispose of non-trash cabin debris items at no cost to you. Illegal dumping, disposing of household trash, and/or placement of materials outside of the dumpster will jeopardize any future projects of this type

and your Cabin Permit. If you're located in an area outside the Laguna Madre, we're interested in your feedback about the need and possible locations for temporary dumpsters in the future. Although this is a costly operation, the GLO is committed to maintaining a clean coastal environment and providing an opportunity for cabin sites, especially those in remote locations, to dispose of debris and materials that may have washed up onshore. As always, we welcome all feedback and stay tuned for more information.

Permit Holder Stories

Lymon Hall of PC1507 reports that after 20+ years of trial and error, the cabin is now generator-free and 100 percent solar powered. The solar panels put out up to 400 watts which charges six golf cart batteries. They easily power lights (including the 35w HID fishing jacklight), water pump, room fans, composting toilet fan and best of all, a small deep freeze. Mr. Hall said, "It's the noise that really bothered me and I never liked schlepping and smelling the gas and generators either, but in the end, it's all about the peace and quiet." **Please note that solar panels require approval from the Texas General Land Office, but we'll work with you on these requests. Contact us for more information.**



From **Richard K. Brown of PC1495**. This is a photo of my father, Richard W. Brown, who passed away on 12/12/13 at the age of 81. He and his partner Lee Pehnke (deceased) rebuilt the cabin shortly after Hurricane Alicia with the help of family and friends. He was the proud permit holder of PC1495 on Moody Island since 1983. His children, grandchildren and great grandchildren will continue to enjoy this family tradition for many years to come.

From **Kit Corbin of PC1561**. A sudden electrical storm exploded on the East Flats early Saturday, September 7th. As we were finishing up breakfast, a strong lightning storm delivered two bolts that struck the nearby water, followed by deafening cracks of thunder. It caught everyone out on the flats by surprise. Within 15 minutes we had about seven boats roll up



with 24 people seeking shelter from the storm. You can see us huddled together outside in the picture. Among them was Adele Grey from Hebronville on her 83rd birthday with her son and friends, a couple of fishing guides with their clients, a pair of ophthalmologists with family, a petroleum geologist and a 7-year-old boy who was scared to death. After things settled down, we all had new friends and an incredible story to tell. After the storm blew through we all said our goodbyes and went back to the order of the day ... fishing! It was fun meeting a bunch of strangers who all had something in common that morning ... fishing and the fear of being electrocuted!

The **Campbell Family Legacy of PC1371**. My father, Wayne Campbell, Sr. (pictured in the middle) came to the coast in the late 40s and began the fishing quest that has been a part of our family for four generations now. Wayne married June (June Bug) in June 1950 and over the next seven years had three sons. All three of us took to fishing like "stink on shrimp." We all have families now and the legacy continues. Every one of us are avid fishermen



and we love the solitude of the cabin, our "Laguna Hilton." I am Wayne Campbell Jr., (right), my brother is Kevin Campbell (left), my son is Jarrett Wayne Campbell and his son is Jaxen Wayne Campbell. That makes four of us Waynes now. We look forward to continuing the quest for those special times at the "Laguna Hilton" that enrich our lives.



More Permit Holder Stories

Easter Weekend

by Junior Firasek, PC1449

We started the weekend from our home in Santa Fe, Texas. My brother, Dwayne Firasek, who lives in Schulenburg, met me and my two boys, Oldrich Firasek III and Glenn Firasek, Thursday afternoon. We loaded up for the 5-7 hour drive to include stops along way for bait and ice. After leaving Santa Fe at 4:30 p.m., we arrived at Bird Island Basin Boat Ramp at 11 p.m. After launching the boat and the 32-mile boat ride, we finally arrived at the cabin around midnight. I think I was only asked three to four times, "Are we there yet?" We arrived to find we had the place to ourselves so we fired up the pier fishing lights. I started to unload supplies and make the beds but the boys were excited to start fishing right away so they asked if their fishing poles were ready. I told them that was next, but when I got started, I walked back into the cabin and found them hard asleep. The only thing they removed was their shoes. Fishing, for them, would wait until morning. This gave my brother and I time to get some fishing in that night. We had some success and still fish the next day.



Oldrich Firasek, Jr. with a 25-inch trout he caught.

Fishing was slow on Friday. Well, let me say that another way, the catching was slow; the fishing was fast and furious with two boys on the boat. Saturday fishing was better; it brought more catching than fishing! Sunday morning the boys awoke to find that the Easter Bunny had left some eggs in the yard for them to find. The boys kept asking how the Easter Bunny found them all the way out there. I told them it was magic and the Easter Bunny knew there were some boys that would enjoy an egg hunt followed by smashing confetti eggs on one another's head. Then we had a quick fishing trip before heading home. The boys had to head back to school for STAR testing and me and my brother were heading back to work, only to dream about the next time we could go to the cabin to make more memories. The memories that were created this weekend will be cherished forever.

I was about the same age as the kids when my dad would take us to cabin P1540 in the land cut. A friend/coworker that my dad knew would invite us to go. I find myself asking how my dad did it with three boys by himself.



*A picture of my brothers and I taken
around 1977-1978.*

The second photo is of my two boys with some of the fish they caught. One was 22 inches and the other was a 21-inch trout. All the fish were caught in the land cut using live shrimp for bait. On the left is my son Oldrich Louis Firasek III, 12 years old, and on the right is my son Oldrich Louis Firasek. Both of my sons were named after their grandfather. I know they would have been proud of their grandsons. This is where I got the passion to fish from. I have also inherited the love of fishing from my father. This photo was taken around 1977-78. The boys in this photo are Oldrich Louis Firasek III (13 years old), Dwayne Firasek (15 years old) and Michael Firasek (17 years old). We were all brothers, not realizing at the time what we really were doing. We were sharing the same cabin and fishing passion with our father.



Oldrich Louis Firasek III and Glenn Michael Firasek with some of the fish they caught.

Titlum Tatlum Bayhouse Cup Fishing Tournament

by Todd Tullos, PC1529

Every May, Todd Tullos of cabin PC1529 holds an annual Titlum Tatlum Bayhouse Cup Fishing Tournament. This past May was the 5th annual tournament. We hold this tournament for cabins located on or near Titlum Tatlum Bayou near San Luis Pass. The prize is a large trophy cup that the winning cabin retains for the year until the next tournament comes



The winners from PC 1519.

around. We started this tournament with the goal of holding an annual event for Titlum Tatlum cabin permit holders to get together, to get to know one another, and to earn some bragging rights. On busy weekends throughout the year, you can count on the trophy being displayed in front of the winning cabin. The catch consists of two redbfish, two trout and two flounder, with the heaviest combined stringer winning the trophy. In 2013, the weight totals from three cabins were separated by less than a pound. The 2013 winner was the group from cabin PC1519, "The Flamingo." Members of PC1519 in the first photo are, from left to right, Kevin Dent, David Luster, Andrea Luster, Kelsi Humbird, Chris LeCompte, Bryce Humbird, Brandell Humbird and Kary Dent. Eight cabins participated last year.



The leader board.

Permit Holders



Don Zvonek of PC1557 with his nice trout.



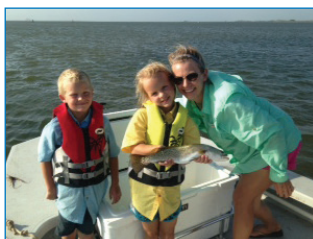
Mike, Joey, Russell and friends from PC1367 enjoying the great outdoors on the bay. Good food, good friends, good times!



This is a picture of PC1198 (Hack's Shack) on Moody's Island by Titlum Tatum Bayou. This is the third cabin they've built since building the first cabin after Hurricane Carla in 1961.



Kit Corbin and his dog Ruby at PC1561.



From PC1225, here are Lia, Landon and their mom Nicole Eller with Lia's trout.



Art Barkis of PC1121 had his friend Stuart Napier visit. He caught his personal best, a 30 1/8" trout.



Bryan Harwell, a friend of Art Barkis' of PC1121, braved the weather and caught his personal best, a 28" trout.



A beautiful view from the Fish Box Cabin sent in by Don Zvonek of PC1557.



An evening's catch at PC1540 in the landcut last April. L to R are 2nd generation permit holder Craig Mitschke, future 3rd generation permit holder Logan Mitschke and James Richter.



John Graham of PC1088 sent in this picture of Wade Collins (far right) and family members from a trip donated by the Dodd Family in honor of their late grandfather. The trip was hosted by CCA San Antonio.



Michael and Terri Layton from PC1096 with the rest of their team caught this stringer of fish during the Valero fishing tournament while spending the week-end at the cabin.



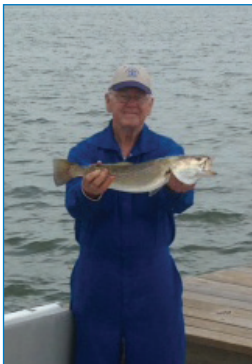
Right to left is Jason Welch, Travis Sandel, Tanya Sandel, Robert Sandel, Khristin Noel and Dale Noel, all of PC1198, after completing the cabin deck.



This is Oldrich Firasek III of PC1449, last year when he was 11 years old, with his personal best 27" trout.



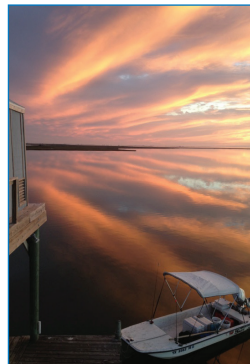
Hayley Hocott of PC1319 eating breakfast after catching some fish.



This is Harley Riebschleager from PC1225 and his nice catch.



Richard Hocott of PC1319 showing off his fine catch of the day.



Joe Taylor of PC1511 took this great sunset photo from the cabin on December 28, 2013.

More Permit Holder Stories

The Beast of Baffin Bay

by Bob Daigle, PC1521

I have been fishing Baffin Bay since my college days, now about 45 years. We have always had a coastal cabin to access Baffin Bay; that of friends (many will remember Ken Cross and Johnny Habeeb) and now our own cabin permit near Lester Roloff's old compound at the north end of the land cut (the "Shiner" cabin).

In the early spring of 1975, a small group of us were wade fishing the south side of Baffin Bay, about a mile in and in waist deep water. My fishing partner was a young man named Geoff, from Kansas, who was about 6' 4" and constructed like a football tight end. This description of his stature becomes noteworthy when you see the picture. Also of interest was the fact that he had never been fishing before, any kind of fishing! So much for living in Kansas!

We were using live shrimp. In those days, since we were too poor to buy them, we used "push nets" to catch our own. My friend was using a "cabin" rod and reel; in other words, an old rig that we left at the cabin for visitors. The line was not fresh and the drag was frozen, but that didn't make any difference in those days, the average size of a speck being what it was. My friend had a small landing net, more suitable for rainbows in the Guadalupe than a beast from Baffin Bay, but like I said, there were a lot of small trout in those days.

I was about 30 yards from Geoff when his poppin' cork went under and he set the hook. The way he set the hook would usually have jerked the entire rig, fish and all out of the water, but this time, whatever he had hooked jerked back and bent him over at the waist to where he was parallel to the surface of the water, with his arms extended straight out and the rod pointing to the horizon. Jeff managed to straighten up, got his rod back up into the air, and started to crank the fish in like someone cranking a boat onto a trailer. I knew that he probably wasn't going to actually land the fish, since his drag was frozen, but I had a much larger landing net and started wading over to him in case we did get a chance to net the fish.

He had winched the fish up to about 20 feet from him when it rolled on top. His next words were (changed for G audiences) "Gosh-darn! That fish is three feet long!" Geoff was a rookie, and the fish obviously could not have been three feet long, but I started walking a lot faster, and got to his side just as he pulled the fish up and close with the rod. I netted it on the first try. It was a big sow trout, still full of eggs - and my first words after netting it were (changed for G audiences again) "Gosh-

darn! That fish is three feet long!"

We measured the trout when we got back to the cabin, weighed it, and took a picture of Geoff holding it. The trout was 35 ½ inches long and showed 18 lbs. on the cheap and rusty hand scale we had. I expect at least 10 to 15 ounces of that were eggs. The story as I have set down here is an accurate description of the event. The most unbelievable part of this true story is that after taking the picture we FILETED THE FISH! In those days we paid less attention to record books than we did to making sure we would not run out of beer.

The picture we took shows Geoff standing up and trying to hold the trout out. My reference to his stature makes it more apparent how large this trout was. I still have some poor copies of this picture. The original was tacked up on our bulletin board in the Shiner cabin for many years, but blew off one windy day.

Many years later, I think it may have been about 1999 or so, I got curious about how the fish would have stacked up to the state record, then and now. What I recall is that the state record 25 years after we caught the monster trout was 33 inches and just over 16 pounds, also caught in Baffin Bay. Our fish has only recently been topped. If we had been more interested in those kinds of things, Geoff's fish would have stood as a state record for over 30 years.

This is not a "fish story." I became the Executive Director of the Texas Game Warden Association, and a member of the Texas Outdoor Writers' Association. We don't have the beast on the wall but the picture of this very large young man holding this very large fish is all the record we ever needed.

Many have urged me to take the picture and the measurements to a taxidermist and have him "build" me our fish to hang on the wall. I may do it one day if I can find someone who could faithfully reproduce the most legendary fish ever to come out of Baffin Bay.

As I have grown older, there have become things about the experience that I regret. I regret that I lost contact with my friend Geoff years ago. I wish we had been mature enough to understand the importance of taking the picture and letting the fish go. And, I wish Geoff was the one holding the net and I was the one with the fishing rod!!

Thanks to all the members of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for the amazing job they have done re-establishing our fish population from the freeze in 1984.

I promise you this story is the gospel truth.....God Bless Texas!

